

TICKET: Military file

U.S. Is Dismantling Peshawar Spy Base

By William J. Coughlin
Los Angeles Times

PESHAWAR, West Pakistan, April 9—The American spy base here still is so secret that the U.S. Air Force refuses to talk about the problems of dismantling it.

Pakistan announced last May it had notified the United States it would have to vacate the base at the expiration of its ten-year lease this coming July 1.

Since then, the removal of acres of towers and antennas, infrared scanners, long-range radars and electronic listening

equipment has been under way.

Some of the information previously relayed from the base now is obtained from orbiting U.S. spy satellites.

Peshawar hit world headlines in 1960, when an American reconnaissance U-2 flown by Francis Gary Powers was shot down inside the Soviet Union. Powers refueled at Peshawar before taking off on his high-flying penetration of Soviet airspace. The Soviet border is only 150 miles from here.

Communications Link

Peshawar, though, was not a U-2 base. When the ten-year lease establishing it was signed on July 18, 1959, it was identified as a link in a worldwide U.S. communications network which could serve Far East and Middle East members of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Pakistan was a member of both organizations.

The strategically located base was, however, a highly sophisticated and computerized listening post to eavesdrop on electronic communications within the Soviet Union and China. From here, tape recordings could be made of missile countdowns, military conversations, civilian radiotelephone communications and other electronic emanations from Central Asia.

At the time the agreement was signed, Pakistan was closely tied to the U.S. by defense alliances and military aid programs. When American military aid to Pakistan was cut off in 1965 after the 22-day war with India broke out, the picture changed.

Looking Elsewhere

Pakistan's government turned first to the Chinese and, last year, to the Soviets for military equipment. The only military equipment now purchased from the U.S. consists of spare parts and other non lethal items.

The original lease on the base provided for a ten-year extension with either party having the option to cancel at a year's notice.

Last April, Soviet Premier Kosygin visited Pakistan. In May, it was announced the base agreement would not be renewed.

In early July the Soviet Union disclosed it had agreed to supply arms to Pakistan. There is reason to believe those events were related. Neither China nor Russia could have been pleased about the U.S. intelligence-gathering operation on their doorstep. Kosygin may well have used the lever of military assistance to bring about its removal.

Once-Busy Base

More than 3000 Americans were stationed here at one time. Although base officials refused to discuss the evacuation timetable, the local talk is that at least half of the Americans have left.

The American embassy in Rawalpindi, which maintains a noncommittal attitude on the spy base 108 miles distant, has arranged auctions of household goods for those American families at Peshawar departing for home. Advertisements of the auctions appear in the Rawalpindi newspapers.

Economic Impact

Many of the residents of Peshawar will be sorry to see the Americans leave. The GIs have left their economic imprint. As many as 300 Pakistanis once worked at the base, according to a former employee.

No announcement has been made as to final disposition of the base. Peshawar is military stronghold of the Pakistanis, just as it was of the British. When the last American leaves, the former U.S. spy base most likely will become a Pakistani military installation.

What the Pakistanis will do with a floodlighted softball diamond remains a mystery.